

THE FRIEND OF GOD

NO. 1962

A SERMON

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 8, 1887,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"You, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend."
Isaiah 41:8.*

*"And he was called the Friend of God."
James 2:23.*

ABRAHAM was called the Friend of God because he was so. The title only declares a fact. The Father of the faithful was beyond all men "the Friend of God," and the head of that chosen race of believers whom Jesus calls His friends. The name is rightly given. We read that "whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof," and much more may we be sure that whatsoever name the Spirit of God has given to any man, that is his proper and right name.

James says not only that this was Abraham's name, but that he was called by it. The name does not occur in his life as given in the Book of Genesis, and it has been questioned whether it occurs anywhere else in Holy Scripture, for many have preferred to translate the word in Isaiah and in 2 Chronicles 20:7, as "lover," or, "beloved," rather than "friend." However this may be, it is quite certain that among the Jewish people Abraham was frequently spoken of as "the Friend of God." At this present moment, among the Arabs and other Muslims, the name of Abraham is not often mentioned, but they speak of him as *Khalil Allah*, or the "Friend of God," or more briefly as *El Khalil*, "the Friend." Those tribes which boast of their descent from him through Ishmael, or through the sons of Keturah, greatly reverence the patriarch, and are known to speak of him under the name which the Holy Spirit here ascribes to him. It is a noble title, not to be equaled by all the names of greatness which have been bestowed by princes, even if they should all meet in one. Patents of nobility are mere vanity when laid side by side with this transcendent honor.

I think I hear you say, "Yes, it was indeed a high degree to which Abraham reached; so high that we cannot attain unto it. It would be idle for us to dream of being accounted friends of God." My brethren, I entreat you, think not so. We also may be called friends of God, and the object of this morning's discourse will be to excite in you the desire to know this matchless friendship. Let me read to you the words of our blessed Lord in the fifteenth chapter of John, "You are My friends if you do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knows not what his lord does, but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of My Father, I have made known unto you." It is, then, within reach; Jesus Himself invites us to live and act, and be His friends. Surely, none of us will neglect any gracious attainment which lies within the region of the possible. None of us will be content with a scanty measure of grace, when we may have life more abundantly. I trust you are not so foolish as to say, "If I may but get to heaven by the skin of my teeth, I shall not care about what I am on the road." This would be wicked talk, and if you speak thus, I am afraid you will never get to heaven at all. He that is being prepared for glory is always hungry after the largest measure of grace. He who is born of God desires his Father's love while he is yet a child, and has no idea of waiting for it till he comes of age, and enters upon his estate. Let me have as much of heaven, even now, as I can have. Yes, let me now be the friend of God. The other day there landed on the shores of France a boat full of people soaked with rain and saltwater, they had lost all their luggage, and had nothing but what they stood upright in; they were glad, indeed, to have been saved from a wreck. It was well that they landed at all, but when it is my lot

again to cross to France, I trust I shall put my foot on shore in a better plight than that. I would prefer to cross the Channel in comfort and land with pleasure. There is all this difference between being “saved so as by fire” and having “an abundant entrance ministered unto us” into the kingdom. Let us enjoy heaven on the road to heaven. Why not? Instead of being fished up as castaways, stranded upon the shores of mercy, let us take our passage on board the well-appointed Liner of Free Grace; let us, if possible, go in the first cabin, enjoying all the comforts of the way, and having fellowship with the great Captain of our Salvation. Why should we think it enough to be mere stowaways? I would stir you up, dear friends, at this time to aspire after the best gifts. Grow in grace! Increase in love to God, and in nearness of access to Him, that the Lord may at this good hour stoop down to us as our great Friend, and then lift us up to be known as His friends.

I have many things to say to you this morning, and therefore, I must speak upon each one with great brevity. I am half afraid that I may be driven to brevity which will render me a little obscure. I ask you first to notice *the title to be wondered at*, “Friend of God.” When we have meditated and marveled, I shall then speak to you under a second head—*the title vindicated*—it was a fit and proper title for Abraham, and we can see it to be so. Thirdly, I shall speak of *the title sought after*. May we all win it and wear it! After all this, I shall conclude with a few words upon *the title used for practical purposes*. May the Holy Spirit help me graciously at this hour!

I. First, may we be divinely instructed while we look at the name, “Friend of God,” and regard it as A TITLE TO BE WONDERED AT.

Admire and adore *the condescending God* who thus speaks of a man like ourselves, and calls him His friend. The heavens are not pure in His heart, and He charged His angels with folly, and yet He takes a man and sets him apart to be His friend. What is man, O Lord, that You are mindful of him? Or the Son of Man, that You visit him? Who among our sinful race can be worthy of the friendship of Jehovah? Only His grace can make it possible for any man to walk with God in high companionship.

In this case the august Friend displays His pure love, since He has nothing to gain. Surely God does not need friends. You and I *need* friendship, we cannot always lead a self-contained and solitary life; we are refreshed by the companionship, sympathy and advice of a like-minded comrade. We are very foolish if we commit ourselves to a host of acquaintances, but we are wise if we have found a faithful friend and know how to make use of him. Friendship is one of the sweetest joys of life; many spirits might have failed beneath the bitterness of trial if they had not found a friend. No such necessity can be supposed of the all-sufficient God.

We know how sweet it is to mingle the current of our life with that of some choice bosom friend. Can God have a friend? Can He also find it in His heart to unbosom Himself to another? Can the secret of Jehovah be with a frail creature? Does the Holy One desire to commune outside of Himself? It cannot be that He is solitary; He is within Himself a whole, not only of unity, but of tri-personality—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and herein is fellowship enough. Yet, behold, in infinite condescension the Lord deigns to seek the acquaintance of His own creature, the love of a man, the friendship of Abraham. I dare not go so far in speech as my thoughts would lead me; it is certainly a great marvel that the Creator of the heavens and the earth should look to Ur of the Chaldees for a man, and should separate him to Himself, to tutor and train him till He made him His friend—an honor which even the cherubim and seraphim have never reached.

Friendship cannot be all on one side. In this particular instance it is intended that we should know that while God was Abraham’s friend, this was not all, but Abraham was God’s friend. He received and returned the friendship of God. From one point of view Abraham was always the object of God’s pity and mercy, but by His grace the Lord lifted him also into another condition, in which he became the object of the Lord’s satisfaction and delight. God gave Abraham His heart, and Abraham gave God his heart. They were knit together in love. To use expressive Scriptural words, the soul of Abraham was bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord, his God. Not only did the Lord speak to Abraham as He did to Moses, “face to face, as a man speaks unto his friend,” but He continually treated him as His friend, and communed with him as such—

*“Stupendous grace of the Most High!
What has the Lord on worms bestowed,*

*Called to the council of the sky,
And numbered with the friends of God!"*

Friendship creates a measure of equality between the persons concerned. I say not that absolute equality is at all necessary to friendship, for a great king may have a firm friend in one of the least of his subjects, but the tendency is towards an equalizing of the two friends; the one comes down gladly, and the other rises up in sympathy. Friendship begets fellowship, and this bridges over the dividing gulf. There can be no idea of equality between God the Lord, and man the servant; indeed, it is only as we see our true relation as servants that we can be friends. Did not Jesus say, "You are My friends, if you do whatsoever I command you"? We must keep our place, or we shall not be friends. Yet see how the Lord comes down to Abraham, and communes with him at his table, while He lifts up Abraham to His own state, so that he sees the things of God, yes, even sees with gladness the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we say of two men that they are friends, we put them down in the same list, but what condescension on the Lord's part to be on terms of friendship with a man! Again I say, no nobility is comparable to this. Parmenio was a great general, but all his fame in that direction is forgotten in the fact that he was known as the friend of Alexander. He had a great love for Alexander as a man, whereas others only cared for him as a conqueror and a monarch, and Alexander, perceiving this, placed great reliance upon Parmenio. Abraham loved God for God's sake, and followed Him fully, and so the Lord made him His *confidant*, and found pleasure in manifesting Himself to him, and in trusting to him His sacred oracles. O Lord, how excellent is Your lovingkindness, that You should make a man Your friend!

I want you also to note *the singular excellence of Abraham*. How could he have been God's friend had not grace worked wonderfully in him? A man is known through his friends; you cannot help judging a person by his companions. Was it not a great venture for God to call any man His friend? For, we are led to judge the character of God by the character of the man whom He selects to be His friend. Yes, and though a man with like passions with us, and subject to weaknesses which the Holy Spirit has not hesitated to record, yet Abraham was a singularly admirable character. The Spirit of God produced in him a deep sincerity, a firm principle, and a noble bearing. Although a plain man, dwelling in tents, the Father of the Faithful is always a right royal personage. A calm dignity surrounds him, and the sons of Heth and the kings of Egypt feel its power. His character is well balanced. He is what is commonly called an all-around man. He walks before God, and is perfect in his generation, so that God is not ashamed to be called his God. I might almost say of Abraham's general life that, like the Lord, he was light, and in him was no darkness at all; of course I only use the expression in the sense intended by our Savior, when He spoke of the whole body being full of light, "having no part dark" (Luke 11:36). Father Abraham is a man fit to be the head of the believing family. His quiet son Isaac is like a valley, above which his father rises like an Alp, in the greater strength of his character. He is equally superior to his notable grandson Jacob, great personality as Jacob is. There is a fuss, and worry, and worldly craft about Jacob, which somewhat beclouds his undoubtedly great faith, but this you do not see in Abraham; he moves majestically along his course, shining like the sun in mid-heaven, before whom even clouds are made into chariots of glory. I say not that Abraham was worthy to be called the Friend of God in the sense of merit, but I do say that the grace of God had made him fit to be a partaker of fellowship with the God of light. While he was justified by his faith, the Lord's calling him just was also justified by his works. James asks, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar?" Indeed he was, by this great deed of obedience, proved to be in a right state before God. His justification was justified. God was just, even in a legal sense, in declaring such a man to be righteous, for righteous he evidently was. Oh that the sanctifying Spirit may prove in us the truth of our faith by the holiness of our works!

Follow me while I note some of the points in which this divine friendship showed itself. *The Lord often visited Abraham*. Friends are sure to visit one another. We read, "The word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision." "The Lord appeared unto Abram," and again, "The Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and He sat in the tent door, in the heat of the day." Three mysterious persons came to Abraham, and he entertained them in his tent under the tree, and provided for them a banquet, and himself waited at the table. Was he not honored above all men to entertain God Himself? The Lord so-journed with the patriarch as in a strange land, and heard the prayers and praises of His servant day by

day. On the other hand, Abraham was prompt to build an altar unto the Lord, and besides this he had his chosen spot for private communion with God, for we read, "Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord." Often did the great Lord and His trustful servant draw near unto each other.

In consequence of these visits of friendship paid to Abraham, *secrets were disclosed*. The Lord informed Abraham as to His design concerning the Canaanites, who were ultimately to be destroyed, but their iniquity was not yet full. He revealed to him the birth of Isaac, and His intent that the covenant blessing should run in the line of the child born according to promise, and when He had determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord said to Himself, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" I suppose it is but a gloss, but Philo quotes this text as from the Septuagint, and puts it thus, "Shall I hide this thing from Abraham My Friend?" The present copies of the Septuagint say, "Abraham, My servant," but the other reading is a very natural one. It was a special proof of divine friendship, that the Lord would not execute judgment till He had heard what the patriarch might say upon it. Abraham, on his part, had no secrets, but laid bare his heart to the inspection of his Divine Friend. Visits were received, and secrets were made known, and thus friendship grew.

More than that, *compacts were entered into*. On certain grand occasions we read, "The Lord made a covenant with Abram." Once with solemn sacrifice a light passed between the divided portions of the victims. At another time it is written that God swore by Himself, saying, "Surely, blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." The two friends grasped hands, and pledged their faith. Here was a faithful God and faithful Abraham bound in an immovable covenant. God trusted Abraham, for He said, "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." And Abraham knew his God, and trusted Him without suspicion, and thus there was firm friendship between them.

This friendship resulted in *the bestowal of innumerable benefits*. The life of Abraham was rich with mercies. We read, "And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things." Friends bless their friends, or at least wish they could do so. Abraham's Almighty Friend denied him no good thing. Abraham was rich, but his riches were blessed; we may say of him, "The gold of that land was good." He was singularly favored in all things to which he set his hand. Jacob, comparing himself with his grandfather, said, "Few and evil are the days of your servant," and his life was certainly acted out upon a far lower level than that of the first of the three great fathers of the chosen seed. The Lord is a friend who can never know a limit in blessing His friends. Having loved His own He loves them to the end. To Abraham through the grace of his Divine Friend, difficulties were blessings, trials were blessings, and the sharpest test of all was the most ennobling blessing.

Since Abraham was God's friend, God *accepted his pleading, and was moved by his influence*. Friends ever have an ear for friends. When Abraham pleaded with God for Sodom, the Lord patiently listened to his renewed pleading. How instructive is that story of the patriarch's pleading for Sodom! How humbly he speaks!—"I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, even I that am but dust and ashes." Yet how boldly he pleads! He ventures to say, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" The strain of his pleading is worthy of special note. It was not an intercession for Sodom so much as an expostulation with God—friend with friend. If we were pleading for London we should naturally appeal to God's mercy, but Abraham takes the bolder course of pleading the divine justice. In fact, his plea is not only for Sodom, but for God Himself, "That be far from You to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from You." As much as if he were more earnest to prevent the name of God from being dishonored by what might look like an injustice, than he was even for the saving of the guilty people. This was a bold stroke. He pleaded rather as a friend of God than as a friend of Sodom, and the Lord recognized to the full the force of his friendly appeal. Lot was rescued, and Zoar was spared, in answer to that prayer; just as Ishmael had been endowed with earthly blessings in response to the pleading, "O that Ishmael might live before You!" and just as the household of Abimelech had been healed in answer to Abraham's supplication.

There was also between these friends *a mutual love and delight*. Abraham rejoiced in Jehovah! He was his shield, and his exceedingly great reward, and the Lord Himself delighted to commune with

Abraham. The serenity of the patriarch's life was caused by his constant joy in God. I cannot now enter into this choice subject for lack of time.

Observe, however, that this friendship was maintained with *great constancy*. The Lord never forsook Abraham; even when the Patriarch erred, the Lord remembered and rescued him. He did not cast him off in old age. Until he was laid in the Cave of Machpelah God was his God, yes, and He is his God at this day, for did He not proclaim Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob? Abraham lives and God is still his God. Constancy is also seen on the human side of this renowned friendship; Abraham did not turn aside to worship any false God, neither did the Lord turn away from the man of His choice.

More than that, the Lord kept His friendship to Abraham by *favoring his posterity*. That is what our first text tells us. The Lord styled Israel, even rebellious Israel "The seed of Abraham My friend." You know how David sought out the seed of Jonathan, and did them good for Jonathan's sake, even so does the Lord love believers who are the seed of believing Abraham, and He still seeks out the children of Abraham His friend to do them good. In the latter days He shall save the literal Israel; the natural branches of the olive, which for a while have been broken off, shall be grafted in again. God has not forgotten His friendship to their father Abraham, and therefore He will return in love to Abraham's seed, and again be their God.

Thus I have glanced at sufficient facts to cause this title of "The Friend of God" to be wondered at. You have all admired the friendship of Damon and Pythias, behold here a greater marvel—the friendship of the Lord God with Abraham, a friendship in which Abraham gave more than his own life in proof of his fidelity, and the Great God still surpassed Him in faithfulness.

II. And now let us notice THE TITLE VINDICATED. Abraham was the Friend of God in a truthful sense. There was great propriety and fullness of meaning in the name as applied to him.

First, *Abraham's trust in God was implicit*. To show what I mean, I will bring before you the patriarch Job. Now Job was a grand believer; under some aspects he has "attained to the first three," but yet Job had a controversy with God, and found it hard to think that the Lord dealt justly with him. He was able, despite all questions, to say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," but he was much tossed about and tumbled up and down in his soul, and those three friends of his suggested no end of doubts. Their philosophy worried him, and Job was not as fully established in the doctrine of divine sovereignty as he might have been. Abraham had no such controversy, "he staggered not." David, too, was sometimes plagued with unbelief, so that he almost came to infidel conclusions. He was perplexed to know how it was that the wicked prospered while he himself was chastened every morning. He descended into the mists of the valley, but Abraham habitually walked the hilltops. Bathing his forehead in the sunlight of Jehovah's love he dwelt beyond all questions and mistrusts. O happy man, to know no skepticisms, but heroically to believe! There is a blessed ignorance which my soul covets. To know is not always gain. Fool that I am, I have too often eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. I wish that I could forget all that has ever been told me which suggests a doubt of my great Lord and His faithful word. I will forget, if I can, all the thoughts of man, for they are vain; I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Abraham possessed that higher knowledge which treads unbelief beneath its feet as unworthy even to be argued down. He was a perfect child towards God, and therefore a complete man. Except you are converted and become as little children you shall in no way enter into friendship with God, for this is God's chief requirement in His friends; that they shall entertain no doubts of Him, but unquestioningly believe Him. Abraham "staggered not at the promise through unbelief," for he knew that what the Lord had promised He was also able to perform.

Next, there was joined to this implicit trust a *practical confidence* as to the accomplishment of everything that God had promised. He went childless for many a day and the temptation came to him, and for a moment prevailed with him, that he must use human means to effect the divine promise, but even then he did not doubt that the promise would be effected. His great mistake showed plainly that he believed the promise would be fulfilled; the fault lay in his interference with the divine method of fulfillment. When he was commanded to slay his son he never doubted that God would keep His promise; he reckoned that God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead, from which he also received him in a figure. Faith is to credit contradictions, and to believe impossibilities, when Jehovah's word is to the front. If

you and I can do this, then we can enter into friendship with God, but not otherwise, for distrust is the death of friendship. If the Lord brings a man near to Himself, it is absolutely needful that, at the very least, there should be perfect confidence on the man's part. "He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." If you think God can lie, you cannot be His friend; you are dividing your interest from the Lord's interest, and committing a breach of friendship, when you distrust. Between man and man confidence may be unduly placed, but towards God you may carry it to the utmost, and know no hesitancy. Believe without limit, and then shall you enjoy fellowship with the Lord.

Next to this, *Abraham's obedience God was unquestioning*. Whatever God bade him do, he did it promptly and thoroughly. When the Lord said to him, "Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you," he went forth, not knowing where he went. And when the Lord bade him go to the unknown mountain, and offer up his son for a burnt-offering, he rose early in the morning, and through three days of sore travail he journeyed to the place where his faith must be tested. When both moral and parental instincts might have held him back, he went onward, feeling that it was not his to question when once the command was clear. Jehovah's will to him was law. Not everyone even yet has learned that it is God who is the author of all law, and that it is His will which makes a certain course to be right, and the contrary of it to be wrong. He was God's servant and yet His friend, therefore he obeyed as seeing Him that is invisible, and trusting Him whom he could not understand.

Abraham's desire for God's glory was uppermost at all times. He did not what others would have done, because he feared the Lord. I think that Abraham comes out grandly when he had pursued the kings who had plundered the cities of the plain. He overcame them, and recovered all their spoils. When Melchizedek met him as the priest of the Most High God, Abraham at once gave him tithes of all, but when the king of Sodom proposed that Abraham should keep all salvage that he had taken, and only restore to him the persons who had been captured, it was grand of Abraham not to touch a particle of the prey, but to say, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoe lace, I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich." He did not want that a petty princeling, or indeed anybody, should boast of enriching Abraham; he trusted solely in his God, and though he had a perfect right to have taken the spoils of war which were his by capture, yet he would not touch them lest the name of his God should be in the least dishonored.

Abraham's communion with God was constant. O happy man, that dwelt on high while men were groveling at his feet! What bliss he knew in those morning communings with God! What peace he felt all day long in the tent and in the plain, since he walked before the Lord, and was perfect towards Him! Whether with the Bedouin or with his own servants, you see the man of God rather than the sheik, and the friend of God rather than the prince. Oh, that you and I may be cleansed to such a pure, holy, and noble life that we, too, may be rightly called the Friends of God!

III. Thirdly, dear friends, you will have patience with me while I stir you up to regard this name as THE TITLE TO BE SOUGHT AFTER. Oh, that we may get to ourselves this good degree, this diploma, as "Friend of God!"

Do you wish to be a friend of God? Well, then, first you must *be fully reconciled to Him*. Of course you cannot remain His enemy and be His friend—that is clear enough. If you are pardoned through the sacrifice of Jesus, if you are justified by His righteousness, if you are regenerated by His Spirit, you are no longer God's enemy, yet that will not entitle you to be called the friend of God. It will entitle you to call God your friend, and your helper, but you must go further than that, if you would be His friend. Love must be created in your heart, gratitude must beget attachment, and attachment must cause delight. You must rejoice in the Lord, and maintain close communion with Him.

To be friends, *we must exercise a mutual choice*; the God who has chosen you must be chosen by you. Most deliberately, heartily, resolutely, undividedly, you must choose God to be your God and your friend. Beloved, there can be no friendship between you and God without your own full consent, or without your ardent desire. What do you say to this? If sin is pardoned, all ground of enmity is gone, but now grace must come in to reign through righteousness unto eternal life, and bring you into a condition of tender love and fervent desire towards the Lord our God.

But you have not gone far enough yet. If we are to be the friends of God, there must be *conformity of heart*, and will, and design, and character to God. Can two walk together except they are agreed? Will God accept as His friend one who despises holiness, who is careless in obedience, who has no interest in the purposes of divine love, no delight in the gospel of Christ? Beloved, the Holy Spirit must make us like God, or else we cannot be friends of God. We must love Jesus the Son, or we cannot love the Father. We cannot rise to the standard of friends of God if self is our ruling force; God is not selfish, and He is not the friend of the selfish. Unless we love what God loves, and hate what God hates, we cannot be His friends. Our lives must, in the main, run in parallel lines with the life of the gracious, holy, and loving God, or else we shall be walking contrary to Him, and He will walk contrary to us.

If we have got as far as that, then the next thing will surely follow—there must be a *continual communion*. The friend of God must not spend a day without God, and he must undertake no work apart from his God. Oh, to live with God, and in God, and for God, and like God! You cannot be a friend of God if your communion with Him is occasional, fitful, distant, broken. If you only think of Him on Sabbaths or at sacraments, you cannot be His friend. Friends love each other's society; the friend of God must abide in God, and walk with God, and then he shall dwell at ease. What do you say to this? Has the grace of God made your feet like hinds' feet to stand on such high places? He can do it. Let us seek after the blessing.

Brethren, if we are to be the friends of God we must be *copartners with Him*. He gives over to us all that He has, and friendship with God will necessitate that we give to Him all that we have. It has been well said that if God is ours we cannot be poor, because God has all, and we have all in having God. On the other hand, the cause of God should not be poor if we can make it rich, and His work should never be in straits if we can find supplies. If we are indeed the Lord's friends we count His cause our cause, His work our work, and we throw all that we have into a Joint Stock Bank with the Great All-in-all.

Friendship, if it exists, will breed *mutual delight*. I cannot explain to you the joy that God has in His people—we shall know that by and by, but He calls His church His Hephzibah and He says, "My delight is in her." I believe our Lord takes infinite delight in a soul which He has new-created, and which He has fashioned after His own likeness. He was glad to see man at the first, and yet afterwards it repented Him that He had made man, but the Lord is always glad to see the new-created man, and He never repents that He has made him upon the face of the earth. The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear Him. I am sure if we are God's friends our greatest joy is to draw near to God, even to God our exceeding joy. I have sometimes wished that I had nothing else to do but to dwell with God in prayer, praise, and preaching. If it were not for the thousand worries and cares which come to me in connection with the lesser matters which arise out of the weaknesses of His church and people, what a happy life mine would be! Indeed, I do not complain, but I only mean that holy service in constant fellowship with God is heaven below. Alas! One has to come down from the Mount of the Transfiguration and meet the lunatic child and the quarrelsome scribes at the bottom of the hill. Our delight is in God. "Yes, my own God is He." He is my all in all. Whatever comes from Him is perfumed with myrrh and aloes and cassia. Even His very threats ring like music in the ears of them that love Him. There is nothing that He does but we will take delight in it. We come at length to love even the rod which He wields. The blows of such a faithful friend are infinitely better than the kisses of our deceitful enemy. The cross which Jesus lays upon us is a light burden, because we delight in Him. The God of love has our love, and He has become the light of our delight. He rejoices over us with singing, and we rejoice before Him with the voice of melody.

But, brothers and sisters, I do not mean to go any further, for we must not tell the secrets of love in the open streets. I see a curtain; a veil shrouding the holy of holies. I dare not lift that veil. Into the most holy place ordinary worshippers cannot come, neither can they look therein till the Lord anoints their eyes and purges their spirits. O Lord, reveal Yourself to the half-opened eyes of Your people. Within that curtain there are choice manifestations, and secret witnesses, and ravishments of supreme delight of which I must not speak, because I feel towards these things as Paul felt concerning that which he saw and heard in Paradise; he said it would be unlawful for a man to utter them. Beloved, may you know these special joys by personal experience, even as he did who is called "Friend of God!"

IV. I have done when I have said a word or two upon the last point, which is THE TITLE TO BE UTILIZED for practical purposes. The practical purposes are just these.

First, *here is a great encouragement to the people of God.* See what possibilities are before you. The other Sabbath morning I tried to say something about the *future* possibilities of saints, since he that was faithful with his pound was made a ruler over ten cities [*The Servants and the Pounds*, Sermon #1969, Volume 33.]. It does not yet appear what we shall be; we have not even the beginning of an idea of what we shall be in the next world if we are found faithful to our Master here, nor what the glory will be that shall transfigure us in the day of the coming of Christ, and during the thousand years of His glorious reign on the earth. But I want you now to notice the prize of your high calling in this life. You may become the friends of God, and may be so manifestly in league with Him that men may call you the friends of God. How few attain to this! Do you know one such person? Let your eyes travel over all the Christian people you know, and tell me how many might be called the friends of God. I know one such man; I will not mention his name. I fear he may not be long on earth, for he is well stricken in age. He is a man who has trusted God, walked with God, and been faithful to God, and has in consequence been greatly honored of God to carry on a vast work of usefulness. I wish I might grow to be like him, but I feel a mere babe in his presence. He is a rare man. Why are there not more such? Because God's arm is shortened? No, but because our iniquities hide Him from us. We might be and we ought to be, such men and women that those who know us at home and in business would discover us to be the friends of Jesus. I would like as a preacher to have it said of me that I maintained the glory of my Lord, and defended the doctrines of His cross, and was the friend of the old gospel while others were gadding after novelties. In some form or other we should aspire after this heavenly friendship. See the possibility that lies within your reach—and make it a reality at once.

Next, *here is solemn thought for those who would be friends of God.* A man's friend must show himself friendly, and behave with tender care for his friend. A little word from a friend will pain you much more than a fierce slander from an enemy. Remember how the Savior said, "It was not an enemy; then I could have borne it: but it was you, a man My equal, My acquaintance." "The Lord your God is a jealous God," and if He brings any of us so near to Him as to be His friends, then His jealousy burns like coals of juniper that have a most vehement flame. He will save you, brother, despite a thousand imperfections, but He will not call you His friend unless you are exceedingly careful to please Him in all things. Shall we draw back from the honor because of the responsibility? No, we delight in the responsibility; we thirst to be well-pleasing to God. Though our God is a consuming fire, we aspire to dwell in Him. To our new nature this fire is its element. Even now we pray that it may refine us, and consume all our dross and tin. We would gladly be baptized with the fire baptism. We wish nothing to be spared which ought to be consumed, or which can be consumed. We accept friendship with God on His own terms. I tremble while I speak. We are willing to bear anything which will make us one with God. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning; do you know what you ask when you pray to be filled with Him? I trust you will reply, "Be it what it may, I desire to feel that heavenly influence which can make me forever the friend of God."

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JAMES 2:14-26; JOHN 15:9-17.

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